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THE BINDING
OF THE BEAST

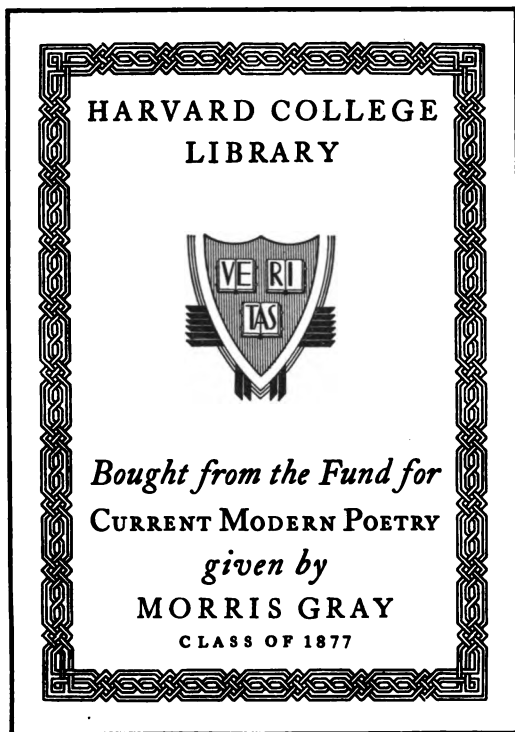
AND

OTHER WAR VERSE

BY

GEORGE STERLING

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THE BINDING OF THE BEAST: and Other War Verse.
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corners of the binding.

**THE BINDING OF THE BEAST
AND OTHER WAR VERSE**

THE
BINDING OF THE BEAST
AND OTHER WAR VERSE

BY
GEORGE STERLING

AUTHOR OF
THE TESTIMONY OF THE SUNS
A WINE OF WIZARDRY
THE HOUSE OF ORCHIDS
BEYOND THE BREAKERS
YOSEMITE
THE CAGED EAGLE

SAN FRANCISCO
A. M. ROBERTSON
MCMXVII

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BY A. M. ROBERTSON

TO
EDWARD F. O'DAY

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

One of the poems in this volume, "Christmas Under Arms," was written in December, 1913, and appeared in "Beyond the Breakers," published 1914, and some of the other verses are from "The Caged Eagle," published 1916.

CHRISTMAS UNDER ARMS

By the star that led kings to His feet in the night of
His birth,
Put ye no trust in kings nor the mighty ones of the
earth!
Put ye no trust in prayer nor abase ye unto the
Past—
By the star of the mind alone shall your sons see clear
at last!

Who are we that we make us a feast, or say of the
years, "They are ours!"
As the lost might revel in Hell and bind their fore-
heads with flowers?
Wherefore now are we glad, when the nations toil in
their night,
Seeking them battle-music and engines grievous to
smite?

A thousand masters are ours, and the weight of a
thousand chains;
We cease not this side death to seek new bondage and
pains.

CHRISTMAS UNDER ARMS

Him that forgeth the shackles, him we acknowledge
as lord,
And darker over the burdened world falls the shadow
of the sword.

Cannon arraigneth cannon, and fort is answer to fort;
Death sits silent and masked by the cliffs and dunes
of the port;
They gird themselves in the East to the day when
their battleships go forth,
And there comes no pause in the thunder of the forges
of war in the North.

Whither, O Man! say whither may the steel-girt
highway lead!
We have made of the past a shambles red and a place
where vultures feed.
Nay! must it ever be thus with the hope and promise
of Life—
Ever the agony, ever the waste and the hatred and
blindness of strife?

Which way we look is night, and the wind of a great
unrest
Moans on our high-built towers, and passes on to the
West.

CHRISTMAS UNDER ARMS

Vague in the gloom before us move shadows vaster
than man,
And doubts lay hold on the human host and rumors
trouble our van.

Have we builded but for the flame, and sown that
Death may reap?
Shall we give our morning to murder and our noon
to eternal sleep?
Answer, Thou who we dream dost abide in the gloom
apart!—
There is no answer, O Man! except in the silence of
thy heart!

With thee alone is the answer, and the answer is
"Love and Peace!"
Except the message be heard, the bountiful years shall
cease;
Except the message be honored, a curse shall come
to the lands
Where thou waitest on Christmas morning with a
sheathless sword in thy hands!

December, 1913.

THE SONG OF THE VALKYRS

Horizons of the world, what hide ye from our sight?

What Fates sing now from darkness their ancient
battle-song?

Are those the armored Valkyrs men hear across the
night?

What god hath set the trumpet to lips austere and
strong?

The deeps and heights are shaken. The walls of the
Dark

Tremble with all their stars, and all stars reel.

Shadows from outer night draw closer now to hark
The echo of what thunders, the music of whose
steel?

Whose is the war? Who first hath drawn the sword?

"A king!" cry the Valkyrs, "whose rule is on the
race!

Woe to the many, who hold one man their lord,

For one hath loosed the tempest, and hid the
heavens' face!

THE SONG OF THE VALKYRS

“War’s gate is down, and Thor! Thor is forth!
He hath thrown off old harness, to forge him
weapons new.

The gaunt guns toll, sounding from south to north,
To call young men to doom, till young men are few.

“The old men shall call, and the young men shall
hear,

Hear and set out, who never shall come back—
They that might have sown in the spring of the year,
They that now shall reap the bitter grain and
black.

“The tides of doom’s sea are mounted unto flood;
The long dykes are down, sundered at one man’s
breath.

All the youth of Europe shall render of their blood.
All the youth of Europe shall sit at dice with
Death.

“Ravens, appear! and come, ye birds of prey,
From high and lonely places, for now is food for all.
Wolves of the night, be early on your way!
The fold is left open; they guard another wall.

THE SONG OF THE VALKYRS

**"Thor! Thor is forth! Hark to his ocean-voice!
The blood of the world makes scarlet his hands.
Thor is forth upon the dark! Sisters, rejoice!
A king hath loosed the god whose sword is on the
lands!"**

THE DREAM OF WILHELM II

He, a colossus towering toward the spheres,
With tyrant shadow casting triple night
On Europe, saw with dominating sight
The great world-caldron seethe with futile tears,
And heard as with a god's commending ears
The tread of armies whose resistless might
Should stay mankind's advancement to the light,
But throne his dynasty a thousand years.

Then rose he from the conquered globe on wings
Such as in vision serve the will of kings,
Till gazing from the violated skies
He saw, below his battles' smoky bars,
With flaming France and Russia for its eyes,
Earth like a skull that glared upon the stars.

TO GERMANY

I

Beat back thy forfeit plow-shares into swords:
It is not yet, the far, seraphic dream
Of peace made beautiful and love supreme.
Now let the strong, unweariable chords
Of battle shake to thunder, and the hordes
Advance, where now the famished vultures scream.
The standards gather and the trumpets gleam;
Down the long hill-side stare the mounted lords.

Now far beyond the tumult and the hate,
The white-clad nurses and the surgeons wait
The backward currents of tormented life,
When on the waiting silences shall come
The screams of men, and, ere those lips are dumb,
The searching probe, the ligature and knife.

TO GERMANY

II

Was it for such, the brutehood and the pain,
Civilization gave her holy fire
Unto thy wardship, and the snowy spire
Of her august and most exalted fane?
Are these the harvests of her ancient rain
Men reap at evening in the scarlet mire,
Or where the mountain smokes, a dreadful pyre,
Or where the warship drags a bloody stain?

Are these thy votive lilies and their dews,
That now the outraged stars look down to see?
Behold them, where the cold, prophetic damps
Congeal on youthful brows so soon to lose
Their dream of sacrifice to thee—to thee,
Harlot to Murder in a thousand camps!

TO GERMANY

III

Was it for this that loving men and true
Have labored in the darkness and the light
To rear the solemn temple of the Right,
On Reason's deep foundations, bared anew
Long after the Caesarian eagles flew
And Rome's last thunder died upon the Night?
Cuirassed, the cannon menace from the height;
Armored, the new-born eagles take the blue.

Wait not thy lords the avenging, certain knell—
One with the captains and abhorrent fames
The echoes of whose conquests died in Hell?—
They that have loosened the ensanguined flood,
And whose malign and execrable names
The Seraph of the Record writes in blood.

TO GERMANY

IV

From gravid trench and sullen parapet,
Profane the wounded lands with mine or shell!
Turn thou upon the world thy cannons' Hell,
Till many million women's eyes are wet!
Ravage and slay! Pile up the eternal debt!
But when the fanes of France and Belgium fell
Another ruin was on earth as well,
And ashes that the race shall not forget.

Not by the devastation of the guns,
Nor tempest-shock, nor steel's subverting edge,
Nor yet the slow erasure of the suns
The downfall came, betrayer of thy trust!
But at the dissolution of a pledge
The temple of thine honor sank to dust.

TO GERMANY

V

Make not thy prayer to Heaven, lest perchance,
O troubler of the world, the heavens hear!
But trust in Uhlan and in cannoneer,
And, ere the Russian hough thee, set thy lance
Against the dear and blameless breast of France!
Put on thy mail tremendous and austere,
And let the squadrons of thy wrath appear,
And bid the standards and the guns advance!

Those as an evil mist shall pass away,
As once the Assyrian before the Lord:
Thou standest between mortals and the day,
Ere God, grown weary of thine armored reign,
Lift from the world the shadow of thy sword
And bid the stars of morning sing again.

August, 1914.

TO GERMANY

VI

Beyond all evil that the tongue can name,—
Below all pits wherein we paint a Hell,—
Oh! deep, deep, deep below the blackest well
And secular abyss of human shame,
Rot now the monstrous relics of thy fame!
There worm and carrion-snake may find a cell;
There fancied devils might in common dwell,
And find their honor and thine own the same.

Upon that charnel which thy hands have built
Thy sword has graven all thy tale of guilt—
The names that Time shall sicken to recall.
Pollution is upon thee like the mire
In which thine armies work thy dark desire
And in whose slime thy sated princes crawl.

October, 1917.

BELGIUM, AUGUST, 1914

O Earth! O star of sorrow! at thy breast
What vampires have had sustenance of thee!
From thy dark womb what furies have gone free
And in thy shadowy lap what dragons nest!
O beautiful as thou art all unblest!
From thee so fair shall births so monstrous be,
And in thy smile must man forever see
A hidden hatred, endless and suppressed?

How harmless are thy serpents, matched with man!
How gentle are the wars of fen or wave,
Beside this other that thy children plan!
Across the dykes of mercy sweeps the flood;
Butcher and beast, the hordes of Odin rave,
Whom War hath blinded with the dust of blood!

ENGLAND, AUGUST, 1914

Southward again on ancient roads of war,
Beyond the Narrow Seas thy legions flow,
Where wait the battle-fields of long-ago,
Ramparts thy lion-flag hath known before,
And cities where they crowned thee conqueror.
Depart the youthful ranks that cannot know
As yet the power and malice of the foe,
But know what vow those perjured lips forswore.

Thy war is for the sanctity of pledge—
Whether the word of man to man endure,
Or that his bond be as a rope of sand.
Forth! till the world be cleansed of sacrilege,
And those antique foundations rest secure
On which the pillars of the Temple stand!

TO THE WAR-LORDS

I

Be yours the doom Isaiah's voice foretold,
Lifted on Babylon, O ye whose hands
Cast the sword's shadow upon weaker lands,
And for whose pride a million hearths grow cold!
Ye reap but with the cannon, and do hold
Your plowing to the murder-god's commands;
And at your altars Desolation stands,
And in your hearts is conquest, as of old.

The legions perish and the warships drown;
The fish and vulture batten on the slain;
And it is ye whose word hath shaken down
The dykes that hold the chartless sea of pain.
Your prayers deceive not men, nor shall a crown
Hide on the brow the murder-mark of Cain.

TO THE WAR-LORDS

II

Now glut yourselves with conflict, nor refrain,
But let your famished provinces be fed
From bursting granaries of steel and lead!
Decree the sowing of that deadly grain
Where the great war-horse, maddened with his pain,
Stamps on the mangled living and the dead,
And from the entreated heavens overhead
Falls from a brother's hand a fiery rain.

Lift not your voices to the gentle Christ:
Your god is of the shambles! Let the moan
Of nations be your psalter, and their youth
To Moloch and to Bel be sacrificed!
A world to which ye proffered lies alone
Learns now from Death the horror of your truth.

TO THE WAR-LORDS

III

How have you fed your people upon lies,
And cried "Peace! peace!" and knew it would
not be!

For now the iron dragons take the sea,
And in the new-found fortress of the skies,
Alert and fierce a deadly eagle flies.

Ten thousand cannon echo your decree,
To whose profound refrain ye bend the knee
And lift unto the Lord of Love your eyes.

This is Hell's work: why raise your hands to Him,
And those hands mailed, and holding up the sword?

There stands another altar, stained with red,
At whose basalt the infernal seraphim
Uplift to Satan, your conspirant lord,
The blood of nations, at your mandate shed.

THE WAR-GOD

Behold the pandar of Oblivion—

 This idiot monster, holding hate his law!

 It is for him that Life must stand in awe,
For him that Art hath cringed and Science done
Whoredom among the tribes, refusing none.

 In his red day our scruples are as straw:

 The nations gather at his word, and draw
His chariot, refulgent as the sun.

The stars of many masterdoms have set,

 But that star sets not ever, and the light

 That fell on Troy is cast on Europe now;

And as of old the mothers' eyes are wet,

 And the brute god, girded with steel and night,

 Above Time's charnel scowls with armored brow.

THE LITTLE FARM

Along the vague horizon, vapor-bound,
A monstrous muttering forever broke,
As tho the Titans at their council spoke,
Far off, or in some cavern underground;
But at the little farm there was no sound,
Save when a low and idiot laughter woke.
Ashes, till then a home, sent up their smoke:
A raven dozed upon an eyeless hound.

One laughed whom men had fettered to a tree.
Above his head a broken-hilted knife
Pinned a small hand that clasped a bit of string.
And still he laughed, nor turned his gaze to see
The stripped and ravished body of his wife.
A weathered sign announced: No Trespassing.

THE BINDING OF THE BEAST

He plotted in the den of his lordship over men;
He wrought his grim array and he hungered for the
Day.

Then the loosing-word was spoken; then the seal of
Hell was broken;

Then its Princes were assembled for the feast;
But against the Vandal night rose the star of Free-
dom's light,

And a world was called together for the binding of
the Beast.

They have seen it for their star; they have come from
near and far;

From the forges of the north go the men and young
men forth,

Having found the holier duty, found the true, the final
beauty,

As their brothers of the south and of the east.

In the forests of the west they are giving of their
best,

With strong hands and patient for the binding of the
Beast.

THE BINDING OF THE BEAST

For his treason unto man in the War that he began,
For the rapine and the flame, for the hissing of his
 name,
Have the hosts gone up against him and with swords
 of judgment fenced him,
With his coward clutch on woman and on priest.
For the children he has maimed, for the maidens he
 has shamed,
The nations gird their harness for the binding of the
 Beast.

Now frothing in his rage, a scourge to youth and age,
Caked with blood he stands at bay, with his feet upon
 his prey.
Ringed with surf of guns resounding, raw and fetid
 from the hounding,
Smiles he still in baffled fury and the roar of hate
 releast;
But the huntsmen of the ranks, with their steel at
 breast and flanks,
Give no truce nor sign of respite at the binding of the
 Beast.

THE BINDING OF THE BEAST

He is cunning, he is strong, and the war shall yet be
long,
Where the seven thunders wake and the walls of
Heaven shake.
He is cruel, blind and ruthless; he is bitter, sly and
truthless;
By his will the Powers of Darkness are increast;
But the shackle and the chain shall avenge the hurt
and slain,
Who have broken bread with heroes at the binding of
the Beast.

For his pact with Death and Hell, let us bind the
monster well,
That the menaced world be freed from his arrogance
and greed!
By the pact he dared to sever, make we treaty with
him never,
Till the murder-venom in his blood has ceast!
By his trust in force and war, end we those forever-
more,
As the nations sit in council for the binding of the
Beast!

TO BELGIUM

As Rome beat down the kingdoms, one by one,
With sword invincible, until her sway
Held from the rise to set of Europe's day,
So to his war-adventure leapt the Hun,
And as the Roman wrought, so had he done,
Were not thy sons as lions on his way.
Granite he found thee, who had thought thee clay,
O nation clothed as with the noonday sun!

O barrier to the tempest! Faithful wall
That held the armored avalanche a space!
O little dyke against so great a flood!
Thou sentry, whom no midnight could appall!
Thou Christ of nations, giving to the race
That respite purchased with thy holy blood!

GERMANY

As he who shod the horses of the sun,
She made her desecrated forges peal
To monstrous births of cannon and of keel,
Where fires deliver and the hammers stun;
And when the daylight and the toil were done,
Upon the breast of Peace she set her heel,
Loosing the headlong avalanche of steel,
With lance on lance and gun on cruel gun.

As Samson in his blindness hath she snapt
The pillars of the temple of the light,
Drawn down in ruin upon Europe's head.
To heavens in the smoke of conquest wrapt
There cry unheeded voices in the night,
From new-made ramparts builded of the dead.

August, 1914.

TO FRANCE

O daughter of the morning! on thy brow
Immortal be the lilies thou hast won!
Eternal be thy station in the sun,
That shines not on a splendor such as thou!
A strength is thine beyond the armored prow,
And past dominion of the lance and gun,
Tho now thou stand, as battle-thunders stun,
Heroic, on the fields that cannon plow.

Triumph be thine, O beautiful and dear!
Whose cause is one with Freedom and her name.
The armies of the night devise thee wrong,
But on thy helm the star of Truth is clear,
And Truth shall conquer, tho thy cities flame,
And morning break, tho now the night is strong!

THE NIGHT OF MAN

Europe, how have kings dealt with thee, and sown
Thine every acre from a human breast!
Red was the seed and red the harrow pressed
To bitter fields whose harvest was a moan;
And the long years pass on to the unknown,
And cannon utter now thy lords' unrest,
Where still their armies gather for the test,
And heavy darkness holds about the throne.

And shall they sow forever in this wise,
To reap that corn whose roots take hold on Hell?
Better a desert and the sunlight there,
In which the lions gaze with stony eyes
From nameless ruins where the lizards dwell,
And the small hawk floats lonely on the air.

THE TURK

Behold him! the abominable! the beast!
The butcher of the race, malignly red
With blood of helpless ones from heel to head!
Behold this infamy by Fate released
On gentler nations given as a feast
Where vultures batten after he has fed,
And trampled bosoms of the tortured dead
Pave his dominion of the ravished East.

Over the rondure of the world a cry
Goes forth against him, as Armenia's breast
Implores a hundredth time for God to save—
A bleak and dreadful voice upon the sky
To North and South, and in the avenging West
An echo of the moan that Belgium gave.

TO THE ALLIED ARMS

Where children slept, gun answers unto gun ;
Where peace was on the orchards, armies fight ;
Now burst, on vale and devastated height,
The tides that raven and the seas that stun.
Yet wage ye now the battles of the sun
And with a holy ray your flags are bright,
Tho deep on Europe lies the two-fold night
Of pain's despair and death's oblivion.

More clear, more terrible, the days reveal
What foe is yours, and how malignly vast
The horror and betrayal of its plan—
That tyranny which rears its crest of steel
To blot the Future's blue, a shadow cast
By Hell's red star on Liberty and Man.

THE CROWN-PRINCE AT VERDUN

By Mars his hilt! this is a royal sport,
And fit amusement for a king-to-be!
Surely the revels now permitted thee
Excel the poor diversions of a court!
Against the tireless thunder of the fort
Thy ranks go forth as waves upon a sea—
Puppets and pawns that move at thy decree.
A merry game, but mayst thou find it short!

Or is it as a painter that thy skill
Favors the world?—daubing with red the snow,
As on the mighty canvas of a hill
Thy cannon spread the pigments, till the whole
Stands perfect, and applauding armies know
The vision of the Hell that waits thy soul.

BEFORE DAWN IN AMERICA

Slowly the hours beyond the midnight crawl.

Far on the frozen night a train goes by.

I know there is no starlight in the sky,
But that concealing fog is over all,
Alike for stars and men a somber pall.

Remoter now, a cold, mechanic cry
Is signal, and the poplars stir and sigh,
As ranks that wait in vain the trumpet's call.

Now breaks the day on Belgium and France.

Over the shoulder of the world, I know
What rubrics gleam on the recording snow
(That page of Heaven's book that lay so pure!)
As, votive to the race's huge mischance,
Men die, O Liberty! that thou endure.

1916.

TO ENGLAND

O mighty Mother of our heart and mind!
We, sons of thine in vision and in deed,
Gaze eastward, where our brothers toil and bleed,
And hear thy battle-music on the wind.
Behold! we gaze, who are to thee as blind,
And listen, seeming deaf to all thy need,
But in our hearts what ancient Voices plead!
What clarions echo, calling kind to kind!

We are a folk of many hearths and hates,
Fretted with alien counsels, and unsure;
Yet some there be who know our war is one,
And strain upon the barrier of our Fates,
And scorn the coward twilight that endures
Between our darkness and thy noonday sun.

1916.

TO FRANCE AT VERDUN

Glory to God for thy might,—
Glory with prayer and song,
France of the sword of light,
Saving a world from wrong!
Thou who dost count not the pain and the cost,
Music of cannon is forth on the world;
Over thy borders what legions are hurled!
Stand, or the world is lost!

Ramparts of darkness were thine,
Once, ere democracy's dawn—
Dungeons and shackles malign,
Precious to kings and their spawn;
Those thou hast crushed with thy terrible heel,
Daughter of freedom, of justice and truth!
War shall be thine in thy beautiful youth—
Never a new Bastile!

Ramparts of stars and of sun—
These thou defendest to-day,
Holding the hills of Verdun,
Stronger than lions at bay.
Thou who in sorrow dost cry not "Alas!"
Thou who in battle art first in the field,
Stand (for the hearts of the world are thy shield)
Crying, "They shall not pass!"

IN A THOUSAND YEARS

What will they think of this age in a thousand years,
In the reaping-time of our sown and pregnant tears?
What will they think when the hands of War at last
Fall from the race's throat and his reign is past?—
When, on the hills where Verdun's cannon stood,
Gaul and Teuton are one in brotherhood?
You of the future's nobler hopes and fears,
What will you think of this age in a thousand years?

What will they think when the children toil no more,
And the old folk rest from the labor long since o'er?—
When no man's need is cause for another's gain,
And each man's grief is part of another's pain?—
When the common sunlight finds not ever a thrall,
And the whole great earth is home and heaven for
all?
You of the future's nobler hopes and fears,
What will you think of this age in a thousand years?

-IN A THOUSAND YEARS

What will they think when the tyrant's brow is dust?
What will they think when the spirit's chains are rust,
And the final freedoms lead us out to the light
From the prison-glooms and haunted cells of the
night?—

When the many creeds are one in a wider grace,
And the many races blend in the Royal Race?
You of the future's nobler hopes and fears,
What will you think of this age in a thousand years?

Scorn us not, for the fighting strain was strong!
Scorn us not, for the ancient dark was long!
Long our bleeding feet were slow on the path
Up from the hells of ignorance and wrath.
You whose eyes shall see so freely and far,
Know that ours were loyal too to a star,
Seeing there, tho blurred with the doubting tears,
The sun whose dawn shall surge in a thousand years.

GERMANY IN BELGIUM

I

Mankind had dreamed its paltry dream of Hell,
And Satan gloating on a race undone.
Then through our mist of visions drave the Hun,
And on the world a blacker shadow fell.
So shall the fact deride, the truth dispel,
The flimsy web that childish minds have spun,
Till Horror bare her shambles to the sun,
And that be told we whisper as we tell.

God, when we pictured Hell, You must have smiled.
Look down and see: abomination piled
Upon abomination! Flood on flood
Of tears outwrung from innocence and age!
What spite of fiends is in the Teuton rage!
What venoms of the Pit are in their blood!

GERMANY IN BELGIUM

II

One after one the veils are torn aside,
Till now we see, as from a sunlit place,
That this is Hell we fight, and not a race.
Lo! these are they that in their lust and pride
Purpose to be our human light and guide!
But these are they for whom Man's humbled face
Is blackened before Heaven with disgrace,
And with their blazon of dishonor dyed.

Say not we are blood-brothers to this Thing
That slays for very cruelty and spite,
Heaping with babes his altar unto Mars!—
This Birth for which polluted Earth might swing
With errant orbit into utter night,
And hide her visage from the sickened stars.

GERMANY ON THE SEAS

"The submarine then proceeded to shell the defenseless life-boats."—ANY NEWSPAPER.

What monsters of the mythologic den
Shall match the horror of the Hun at sea?
The frozen blood congeals, then, leaping free,
Goes furious on its outraged course again.
This is the work of devils, not of men!
By this they do, know now that man may be
Deeper below the beast than ever we
Have soared above the reptiles of the fen.

They do this open-eyed. This is their plan,
Tho all the world go sick with qualms of it.
Such savageries do men devise for man,
Conscious and nothing loth, as tho Hell's slime
Took form to do the bidding of the Pit—
A stench upon our days and ways of Time!

A VISION OF GERMANIA

"SPURLOS VERSENKT"

She took the sword that shone at Waterloo,
Drawn once in aid and service of the right,
But tarnished now, that was awhile so bright,
And gazing on the shameful steel, she knew
What maculations left so strange a hue—
The blood of innocence that dried to blight:
Across the Gothic vastness of her night
Far oceanward the forfeit blade she threw.

Past Verdun and the long Biscayan dune
It gleamed like Arthur's glaive below the moon,
And falling, broke the sea to foamy chaff.
Outward a swift and ever-lessening wave
Swept moaning from the dark, dishonored grave.
"Sunk without trace!" cried Satan with a laugh.

TO THE HUN

Not for the lust of conquest do we blame
Thy monstrous armies, nor the blinded rage
That holds thee traitor to this gentler age,
Nor yet for cities given to the flame;
For changing Europe finds thy heart the same
And as of old thy bestial heritage.
The Light is not for thee. The war we wage
Is less on thee than on thy deathless shame.

Lo! this is thy betrayal—that we know,
Gazing on thee, how far Man's footsteps stray
From the pure heights of love and brotherhood,—
How deep in undelivered night we go,—
How long on bitter paths we shall delay,
Held by thy bruteship from the Gates of Good.

WAR

THE PAST

In that abyss what monsters greet the sight!
Then were the fertile leisures of the sage,
And stony Art saw then her Golden Age;
But nation upon nation in that night,
With flame to blast and savage steel to smite,
Fell fiendlike, drunken with the battle-rage,
And Time's red arm upholds a bloody page
Before the revelation of the light.

The dreadful heritage is on us yet:
Rapine and tears and torment and despair—
The murder-stains wherewith our hands are wet.
Still round us rise the dungeons of the Past,
The crypt abominable whence we fare
Slowly, ah! slowly to the light at last.

WAR

THE PRESENT

They will not pause for counsel. Deadly wings
Take now the skies, and the horizons slay
With hands invisible, and warships sway
To billows broken by their thunderings.
So wrought the lands where now the desert flings
A pall of sand on columns that decay;
And whose the realm none knows unto this day,
Nor knows the Wrath that smote its cruel kings.

Is this the wholesome blue, the heavens of night
Whose eastern star the wise men had for guide?
Found they the Prince of Peace below its light?
That orb hath set. Swift from its holy place
With level wings the pampered vultures slide,
As morning glimmers on a dead man's face.

WAR

THE FUTURE

Be beautiful, O morning's feet of gold,
Upon the mountains of that time to be!
Be swift, O dayspring that shall set us free
From all the blinding tyrannies of old!
Thine are the years by seer and bard foretold,
And thine the judgment driven as a sea
On man's high-treason to humanity.
Thine is the sun their armies shall behold.

O ranks that serve the future and the Right,
How fair your conquests and how high your wars,
When, bathed in that deliverance of light,
Your swords are lifted against pain and wrong,
And, ere man's House be builded toward the stars,
Ye lay its deep foundations with a song!

BY GEORGE STERLING

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